

REMARKS

Reconsideration and Allowance are Respectfully Requested

Claims 55-58 and 62-82 are currently pending. Claims 1-54 and 59-62 have been previously canceled. Claims 55, 68, 70, 71, 74 and 81 have been amended. No claims have been added. No new matter has been added. Reconsideration is respectfully requested.

Applicant would first like to thank the Examiner for indicating consideration of the information disclosure and approval of the proposed drawing.

With regard to the rejections under 35 U.S.C. §112, claims 70, 71 and 81 have been amended as suggested by the Examiner in the outstanding rejection. As such, these claims are now believed to comply with §112, second paragraph, and Applicant respectfully requests that the outstanding rejections be withdrawn.

With regard to the rejections based upon prior art, claims 55-58 and 63-82 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102b as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 3,731,445 to Hoffmann et al. (Hoffmann). This rejection is respectfully traversed in view of the preceding amendments and the remarks which follow.

In particular, claim 55 has been amended to define a disengageable connector for vertically and horizontally interconnecting two individual flooring panels with identical edges to form a permanent or temporary laminate flooring surface on top of a support structure. The connector includes a base having a given width. The base has a projection extending vertically from the base to a first height. The projection has top and bottom portions and includes identical right and left halves for insertion into the edges of two panels to be connected. The top portion of each half comprises identical extensions extending horizontally in opposite directions equal distances, wherein

the combined width of the extensions is less than the width of the base. The extensions include at least one angled portion obliquely sloped in relation to a longitudinal axis of the base. The base further includes two protrusions extending vertically from the base to a second height which is substantially smaller than the first height. The protrusions are spaced apart from the projection and are located on either side of the projection beyond the lateral extent of the extensions.

In contrast to the track disclosed by Hoffmann, the present connector includes a central projection having a first height and protrusions having a second height, wherein the second height of the protrusions is substantially less than the first height of the projection. This provides a disengageable connector facilitating lateral attachment of flooring panels in a convenient and effective manner. The track disclosed by Hoffmann includes equal height projections requiring that the floor tiles be secured from above by applying downward pressure such that the engaging members of the flooring panels sit between the upwardly extending projections of the track. With this in mind, Hoffmann requires that the projections be of equal size such that engagement of the floor tiles is optimized based upon the connection mechanism employed by Hoffmann.

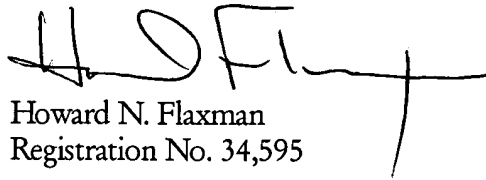
The connection mechanism employed in accordance with the present invention is very different from that employed by Hoffmann and the claims are now believed to define that distinction. As such, it is Applicant's opinion that amended claim 55 overcomes the prior art of record and Applicant respectfully requests that the outstanding rejection be withdrawn. With regard to those claims depending from independent claim 55, they are believed to overcome the prior art of record for the reasons presented above.

With regard to independent claims 68, 70 and 74, as well as those claims depending therefrom, the independent claims have been amended in a manner substantially similar to independent claim 55. As such, these claims also believed to overcome the prior art of record for

the reasons presented above and Applicant respectfully requests that the rejections relating to these claims also be withdrawn.

It is believed that this case is in condition for allowance and reconsideration thereof and early issuance is respectfully requested. If it is felt that an interview would expedite prosecution of this application, please do not hesitate to contact applicant's representative at the below number.

Respectfully submitted,



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Our Docket No. WIL-41062-01